

Pentecost 24, 2023-November 12, 2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Genesis 7:11-16 and Matthew 25:1-13

"The Open Door" Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

There are many images and references of doors throughout the bible. You heard one of the first ones recorded in scripture from Genesis when after all the animals of all kinds and Noah, his wife and Ham, Shem and Japheth and their wives entered the ark. It was the Lord who shut the door of the ark as the rain began. In this reading from Genesis, the focus is on those who are on the right side of the door of the ark. But we also know that everyone and everything else on the other side of the door perished. When we visited the replica of Noah's Ark, the most striking feature to me of this massive structure was the door that separated those that God chose to save from those that were destroyed. On the inside of the ark on that door was a barely visible silhouette of a cross which foreshadowed the way that you and I are saved by Jesus who said, "I am the door, whoever enters by me will be saved."

In the parable that Jesus tells today about the 10 bridesmaids there is another door that is shut like the one on the ark that was shut by the Lord. This parable has within it the harshest words spoken by Jesus found in all of scripture when he said, "Truly I tell you, I do not know me." These words were spoken by the same Jesus who said in his sermon on the mount, "Knock and the door will be opened to you." The parable for today was delivered by Jesus to remind us that there will be a final judgment, but Jesus also assures you in the parable that you have already been given what you need to live by faith and not fear until his return.

Since this worship has been rearranged and shortened so I can head back to Okoboji to pick up Confirmation kids, I could end this sermon quickly by telling you to hear your name called and welcomed into the kingdom of heaven all you need is enough oil in your lamp. If that were so, all you will get into heaven is for Jesus to check your flasks of oil as if they were rain gauges and see if your faith gauge is full enough to get through the door of heaven. But that is not how the wise bridesmaids got in before the door was shut. It was not their oil that made the difference. We were told from the beginning of the parable that the bridegroom was delayed, so what difference would it have made for him to wait a little longer while the foolish went to find more oil for their lamps?

Not many of us use oil lamps regularly anymore. Maybe a more relatable example for us today might be the charge that we have in our cell phones. Today we could say that wise people have their cell phones always charged. Foolish people let the charge on their cell phones run low and if they start running low it is the foolish unprepared people who ask if they can borrow your charger to save their phone from going dead. They wait until they receive a notice that they only have 10% left and are encouraged to switch their cell phones to a battery saving mode to buy a little more time before their phones die.

If you look closely at this parable, there is very little difference between the wise and the foolish bridesmaids. They all had lamps. They **all** fell asleep despite the command at the end of the parable when they are told to stay awake. All ten of them trimmed their lamps when they heard the shout that the bridegroom had arrived. All ten of them were standing outside of the same door. The foolish were not on the wrong side of the house when it was announced that the bridegroom had arrived. The foolish like the wise were in the very presence of the bridegroom. But the foolish went away.

We learned that there were five foolish bridesmaids at the very beginning of this parable. It was not decided at the end. The same was true in the story of Noah and the flood. Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord before the flood came. Five bridesmaids found favor with the Lord at the very beginning of this parable. The five wise bridesmaids simply did what wise bridesmaids would naturally do. They did not wonder if they had enough oil when the bridegroom was announced. And most important of all, they stayed when they heard the voice of the bridegroom. They did not wander off, fearful that they were lacking something that they had to do or show the bridegroom the door to the wedding hall to stay propped open. The wise looked to the one who oversaw the door. The one, Jesus Christ, who announced that he is the door. The wise did not get in by anything that they had acquired on their own. They didn't even show them the amount of oil they had in their flasks. All they had was the faith that was given to them and that was all that made them wise. The wise knew the one who already had their names and were just waiting to hear their name welcomed through the open door.

It is always quite an exhausting process getting everyone registered for Confirmation Camp. We started talking about going camping on the first night that we met with students and parents. Since there were a few months before camp, there is no immediate urgency, but I also know that time gets away from us and the camp may fill up to capacity and the door will be shut at some point. We even did a group hold with the camp which reserves several spots for us while the parents get their students registered. After the deadline for the group hold had expired, last week, I had someone else inquire to see if they could go along with our group to camp. They wanted to go. I wanted them to be able to go. But it wasn't up to me or them to get in. I told them that the deadline had passed, but I would call the camp registrar who was in charge of the door into the camp. I did not want to assume this person could go and walk up the registration table after a long day on Friday only to hear the registrar say to her, "I don't know who you are. I don't have your name on my list." But when I called the registrar at the camp, she said, "If they go online and register TODAY, I will let her come." Her mother did and she was welcomed through the open door of the camp when she arrived because they knew her by her name.

The story of Noah and ark which had the door that separated the saved from those that drowned in the flood and the parable of the 5 wise bridesmaids that were welcomed into the wedding hall and 5 foolish bridesmaids who were not known by the bridegroom makes clear that not everyone will be saved. There is a day of judgment that is on a day that none of us knows. On that day some will be on the right side of the door and others will not.

What is the status of that door today? For that we turn to another door in scripture. This door was closed. It was closed on Good Friday. But it was opened again on Easter morning, and it still stands wide open today. You and I are living in the time of the open door. It is the time for preaching the good news that salvation is found in Jesus alone. It is a time to deliver people from fear who believe they have something more to do and deliver faith that Christ has done all the work for you. You already have what you need to enter the door of salvation. You have received a promise given in baptism that you are a child of God and God never breaks his promises. On judgment day when the Lord calls your name, you will not leave his presence to find something else to give to the Lord. You will stay in his presence because you have been made ready by his promise to you and you will not be turned away. Amen